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Cultural Rights and Library Development and Discourse in Sub-Saharan Africa: Is the Colonial Legacy Still Alive?

Natalia Taylor Poppeliers

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 27

Introduction

Library development in Sub-Saharan Africa has historically been dominated by Western traditions and influenced by the former colonial countries and others in the global North.¹ During the second half of the twentieth century the literature on African librarianship often reflected a discomfort expressed by African librarians at the widening abyss between Western models of librarianship and local realities of Sub-Saharan communities, cultures, and resources. In contrast, the library literature from the global North was frequently marked by tones of paternalism and idealism with many discussions concluding that if Northern libraries, institutions, and associations

¹ Paul Sturges and Richard Neill, *The Quiet Struggle: Information and Libraries for the People of Africa*, 2nd ed. (London: Mansell, 1998), 88-114.

adopted African libraries and assisted in the flow of information and resources from North to South, the problem of information poverty and stunted library development could be alleviated.² The twenty-first century has witnessed the expansion of globalization, the development of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), a strengthened open access movement, the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and the global financial crisis – all of which have impacted libraries and institutions around the world. This chapter examines how the discourse on library development in Sub-Saharan Africa has changed in the new millennium given the events and trends mentioned above. Additionally, I explore recent rhetoric on African library development and investigate the extent to which this new rhetoric recognizes or engages the cultural rights expressed in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). At the core of this discussion are the questions, “What are cultural rights?” and “Why should librarians and information workers be concerned with cultural rights?”

Cultural Rights: A Brief Overview

The UDHR was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948 and later codified into two covenants – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) – both of which are legally binding to those states that have ratified them. The UDHR, ICCPR, and ICESCR together constitute the International Bill of Human Rights and serve as the core basis for other conventions and protocols expanding on or clarifying these rights. Within the UDHR, Articles 22 through 27 address specific economic, social and cultural rights.³

² Peter Johan Lor and Johannes Britz, “Knowledge Production from an African Perspective: International Information Flows and Intellectual Property,” *International Information and Library Review* 37 (2005): 61-76.

³ Mashood A. Baderin and Robert McCorquodale, “The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Forty Years of Development,” in *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Action*, ed. Mashood A.

Of the UDHR Articles, only Article 27 specifically addresses cultural rights although several scholars have argued that there are close links between cultural rights and other rights delineated in the International Bill of Human Rights.⁴ Other scholars have discussed the “transversal character” of cultural rights, arguing that they cover economic, social, civil and political rights, and thus embody the indivisibility of all human rights.⁵ In her elaboration on the transversal quality of cultural rights, Yvonne Donders summarizes it thus:

In short, the broad concept of culture, including not only cultural products but also process-oriented aspects such as association, language, religion and education, implies that cultural rights include many different human rights, which may have a civil, cultural, economic, political or social origin. Cultural rights are not only the rights to create and enjoy cultural products: they include rights to have access to and participate in culture, as well as rights that concern the broad concept of culture, including freedoms of association, language and religion and the right to education. Finally, cultural rights refer to the cultural dimension of other human rights, such as the rights to health, housing and food. Cultural rights are consequently more than merely those rights that explicitly refer to culture, but include all human rights

Baderin and Robert McCorquodale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3-24.

⁴ For a discussion of the connection between cultural rights and other rights such as the rights to education, freedom of expression and information, and religion, see Asbjørn Eide, “Cultural Rights as Individual Human Rights” in *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: A Textbook*, 2nd. ed., ed. Asbjørn Eide, Catarina Krause, and Allan Rosas (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 2001), 289-301.

⁵ Patrice Meyer-Bisch, “Les Droits Culturels Forment-ils une Catégorie Spécifique de Droits de l’Homme? Quelques difficultés logiques,” in *Les Droits Culturels: Une Catégorie Sous-Développée de Droits de l’Homme: VIIIe Colloque Interdisciplinaire sur les Droits de l’Homme à l’Université de Fribourg 28-30 Novembre 1991 Actes et Documents de Suivi*, ed. Patrice Meyer-Bisch (Fribourg, Switzerland : Editions Universitaires, 1993), 17-43.

that protect or promote components of the cultural identity of individuals and communities as part of their dignity.⁶

Similar to the sole explicit reference to culture in the UDHR, the only article specifically addressing cultural rights in the ICESCR is Article 15. Given the minimal mention of cultural rights in the UDHR and the ICESCR, it is easy to see why some authors have considered these rights the “failed Cinderella of the international human rights lexicon.”⁷ ICESCR Article 15 includes the core components mentioned in UDHR Article 27 of the rights to take part in cultural life, to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications, and to benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary, or artistic production of which he is the author. In addition to these components, it includes the following specifications:

2. The steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for the conservation, the development and the diffusion of science and culture.
3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity.
4. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the benefits to be derived from the encouragement and development of international contacts and co-operation in the scientific and cultural fields.⁸

Dominic McGoldrick has argued that there is a significant difference between the “right to take part in cultural life” as stated in the

⁶ Yvonne Donders, “The Legal Framework of the Right to Take Part in Cultural Life,” in *Human Rights in Education, Science and Culture: Legal Developments and Challenges*, ed. Yvonne Donders and Vladimir Volodin (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 231-272.

⁷ Yvonne M. Donders, *Towards a Right to Cultural Identity?* (Antwerpen: Intersentia, 2002), 65-68.

⁸ United Nations, *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (1966), Article 15, sec. 2-4, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ceschr.htm (accessed June 1, 2009).

ICESCR and the right "freely to participate in the cultural life of the community" as presented in the UDHR in that the right to participate "in the cultural life of the community" implies a singular cultural life of a singular community.⁹ Despite this, the contemporary understanding of this right is that there can be many communities in a state, all of which have cultural rights. The *Reporting Guidelines of the Committee on ESC Rights* specify that individuals have the right to take part in the cultural life which he or she considers pertinent as well as the right to manifest his or her own culture.¹⁰ I will explore these distinctions, and their potential meaning and implications for African libraries, further in this chapter.

There are several reasons why cultural rights remain marginalized within the larger human rights documentation.¹¹ There has tended to be a wide spectrum of interpretation for the term "cultural rights." On one side of the spectrum is the intellectual idea of culture and the processes of its creators as relevant only to the areas of art, literature, and music. On the other side of the spectrum is the anthropological sense of culture as a "way of life."¹² Additionally, the term "culture" has often been discussed in broad and vague terms, there has been a lack of consensus on which rights are cultural, and a lack of consensus on how best to implement them. Few states have been eager to adopt specific regulations in relation

⁹ Dominic McGoldrick, "Culture, Cultures, and Cultural Rights," in *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Action* (see note 3), 447-473; for a discussion of the difference between the right "to" culture and the right to take part "in" cultural life see UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Seventh Session 23 November-11 December 1992, *Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Implementation of Cultural Rights: Analytical Study of Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, prepared by Samba Cor Konaté, E/C.12/1992/WP.4, 25 November 1992.

¹⁰ McGoldrick, "Culture, Cultures, and Cultural Rights," 453.

¹¹ Donders, "The Legal Framework," 232.

¹² McGoldrick, "Culture, Cultures, and Cultural Rights," 499; see also Eide, "Cultural Rights as Individual Rights,"; see also Jane K. Cowan, "Introduction," in *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Jane K. Cowan, Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, and Richard A. Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-26.

to cultural rights, most states do not consider them to imply positive state obligations, and many states fear that strengthening cultural rights may lead to tension and instability within society because it may empower certain communities which will challenge national unity.¹³ Despite this marginalization and ambiguity, several scholars have argued that the idea of culture in the international human rights regime has evolved over the years from one narrowly focused on the elitist concepts referring only to the fine arts and literature to a much broader concept presenting culture as a process which includes components relating to, *inter alia*, language, religion and education.¹⁴ UNESCO has been at the heart of the elaboration and delineation of additional standards related to collective and individual cultural rights.¹⁵

An additional paradox when considering cultural rights is their dual nature in that they encompass both individual and "group rights" or the collective rights of peoples.¹⁶ Most human rights, as delineated in the International Bill of Human Rights, have an individualist perspective whereas cultural rights, by their nature, have a strong group or communitarian aspect.¹⁷ While legal provisions may be defined as individual rights, the enjoyment of cultural rights is firmly connected to communities.¹⁸ Freedom of religion, expression, and association are viewed as individual rights although they are essential to the development of culture. To these have been added new claims from communities, such as the collective right to

¹³ Donders, "The Legal Framework," 232.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁵ For an overview of this, see Janusz Symonides, "The History of the Paradox of Cultural Rights and the State of the Discussion with UNESCO" in *Les Droits Culturels* (see note 5), 47-72; for a discussion of UNESCO's involvement in the relationship between the definition of the term "culture" and the universalism versus relativism debate, see Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Between Universalism and Relativism: A Critique of the UNESCO Concept of Culture" in *Culture and Rights* (see note 12), 127-48.

¹⁶ Donders, "The Legal Framework," 234.

¹⁷ McGoldrick, "Culture, Cultures, and Cultural Rights," 450.

¹⁸ Donders, "The Legal Framework," 234.

the development and protection of cultural identity, the right not to have an alien culture imposed on it, the rights of peoples to their own cultural heritage, and the right to participate in the cultural heritage of the world.¹⁹ Related to this paradox, Thomas Hylland Eriksen has argued that the very use of the term culture is misleading and he has advocated that, rather than using the broad and "cozy blanket of culture," it would be better to identify and speak of specific rights such as freedom of religion, language, food habits, ritual practices, local political practices, and so on.²⁰

Further discussions on cultural rights have pointed out that the rhetoric of cultural rights generally focuses on the rights of minorities or indigenous peoples with the assumption being that majority cultures can take care of themselves.²¹ Related to this, Asbjørn Eide has written about the tension that exists between the individual as the producer of culture when that individual finds existing traditions unacceptable or insufficient:

Existing cultural traditions may be considered repressive by some, legitimizing hierarchies, feudal or clan-like with rampant paternalism, inequality and lack of freedom; they may give almost a claustrophobic feeling. Some individuals therefore challenge existing patterns of culture, in favour of innovation and change. The right to innovate and to challenge is not only a significant part of individual cultural rights, but also a cause of tension.²²

Thus, individual cultural rights can both coincide with collective human rights and represent a challenge to them as dominant elites within states or subregions seek to preserve their power based on

¹⁹ Ibid., 234; see also Lyndel V. Prott, "Cultural Rights as Peoples' Rights in International Law," in *The Rights of Peoples*, ed. James Crawford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 93-106; see also Meyer-Bisch "Les Droits Culturels," 18-19, 38-39.

²⁰ Eriksen, "Between Universalism and Relativism," 142.

²¹ McGoldrick, "Culture, Cultures, and Cultural Rights," 451; see, for example, Donders, *Towards a Right*, Chapters VII, VIII and XI.

²² Eide, "Cultural Rights as Individual," 291.

cultural traditions that are then challenged by individuals negatively affected by those traditions.²³

As mentioned earlier, the idea that a state, group, or individual has a single culture has been strongly challenged. An alternative understanding has emerged signaling a state of multiple-cultures and individuals enveloped in an extensive system of sub-cultures.²⁴ McGoldrick, in his discussion of U.S. opposition to the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*,²⁵ points out that the concept of culture as a human right is a form of resistance to the commodification tendency that has come about through the economic liberalization and de-territorialization of markets that has spread with increased globalization. He argues that the U.S. ideology continues to envision "culture" as more individualistic and property-oriented rather than as "more communal, conservative, traditional, and linked to inheritance, and not necessarily being linked to an economic exchange of any sort."²⁶ These paradoxes, and the various and evolving notions of culture, represent a continuing challenge to universal human rights discourse at the macro or conceptual level.²⁷ Conflicts of property vs. communal and individual vs. collective often manifest in discussions of cultural rights and library development in Africa.

Why Should Librarians be Concerned with Cultural Rights?

I will now explore two primary reasons why librarians must be concerned with cultural rights. Foremost, libraries are specifically mentioned in several international human rights documents regarding cultural rights. For example, the Committee on ESC Rights has issued detailed reporting guidelines concerning cultural rights.²⁸ In

²³ Ibid., 300-301.

²⁴ McGoldrick, "Culture, Cultures, and Cultural Rights," 450.

²⁵ The Convention was adopted by the 33rd General Conference of UNESCO in October 2005 and entered into force on 18 March 2007.

²⁶ McGoldrick, "Culture, Cultures, and Cultural Rights," 470.

²⁷ Ibid., 449.

²⁸ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *Revised General Guidelines Regarding the Form and Contents of Reports to be Submitted by States*

this document the Committee specifically asks for States to report on the following in relation to Article 15 of the ICESCR:

a. Availability of funds for the promotion of cultural development and popular participation in cultural life, including public support for private initiative.

b. The institutional infrastructure established for the implementation of policies to promote popular participation in culture, such as cultural centres, museums, libraries, theatres, cinemas, and in traditional arts and crafts.

c. Promotion of cultural identity as a factor of mutual appreciation among individuals, groups, nations and regions.

d. Promotion of awareness and enjoyment of the cultural heritage of national ethnic groups and minorities and of indigenous peoples.

e. Role of mass media and communications media in promoting participation in cultural life.

f. Preservation and presentation of mankind's cultural heritage.

g. Legislation protecting the freedom of artistic creation and performance, including the freedom to disseminate the results of such activities, as well as an indication of any restrictions or limits imposed on the freedom.

h. Professional education in the field of culture and art.

i. Any other measures taken for the conservation, development and diffusion of culture.²⁹

In addition to libraries being explicitly mentioned in part B, I would argue that libraries are implicated in parts C through G due to collection, access, and censorship practices and policies inherent in library and information work. Part C, concerning the "promotion of cultural identity as a factor of mutual appreciation," represents an opportunity for libraries and information workers to blend the right "to participate in the cultural life of the community" with

Parties under Articles 16 and 17 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, E/C.12/1991/1, 17 June 1991.

²⁹ Ibid., 19-20.

the right “to take part in cultural life” by providing spaces and services where multiple community identities are supported and where community members are encouraged to learn, appreciate, and share aspects of significant divergent identities. The reporting guidelines go on to elaborate reporting mechanisms for parts 2-4 of Article 15 related to the right of everyone to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and the right of everyone to benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic work of which he or she is the author. These also relate directly to library collections, access, and community relations.

In addition to the reporting guidelines of the ICESCR, the UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*³⁰ was later codified in the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*³¹ and was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on October 20, 2005 and entered into force on March 18, 2007. This document, while not explicitly mentioning libraries, implicates in its preamble specific areas where libraries continue to play a key role in cultural life. Relevant paragraphs include [emphases in original]:

...Recognizing the importance of traditional knowledge as a source of intangible and material wealth, and in particular the knowledge systems of indigenous peoples, and its positive contribution to sustainable development, as well as the need for its adequate protection and promotion,

Recognizing the need to take measures to protect the diversity of cultural expressions, including their contents, especially in situations where cultural expressions may be threatened by the possibility of extinction or serious impairment...

³⁰ The *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on November 2, 2001.

³¹ UNESCO, *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, CLT.2005/CONVENTION DIVERSITE-CULT REV., 20 October 2005.

Being aware that cultural diversity is strengthened by the free flow of ideas, and that it is nurtured by constant exchanges and interaction between cultures,

Reaffirming that freedom of thought, expression and information, as well as diversity of the media, enable cultural expressions to flourish within societies,...

Recalling that linguistic diversity is a fundamental element of cultural diversity, and reaffirming the fundamental role that education plays in the protection and promotion of cultural expressions,

Taking into account the importance of the vitality of cultures, including for persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples, as manifested in their freedom to create, disseminate and distribute their traditional cultural expressions and to have access thereto, so as to benefit them for their own development...

Recognizing the importance of intellectual property rights in sustaining those involved in cultural creativity...

Noting that while the processes of globalization, which have been facilitated by the rapid development of information and communication technologies, afford unprecedented conditions for enhanced interaction between cultures, they also represent a challenge for cultural diversity, namely in view of risks of imbalances between rich and poor countries...³²

These are but two examples of libraries being either explicitly or implicitly connected with human rights documentation.

The second reason why librarians and information workers should be concerned about cultural rights is that the core ideals of the library profession as developed in the Anglo-American tradition implicate cultural rights. While at first glance the *Library Bill of Rights* of the American Library Association (ALA)³³ appears to fo-

³² Ibid., 1-2.

³³ American Library Association, "Library Bill of Rights," <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/statements/f/librarybillrights.cfm> (accessed May 31, 2009). The Library Bill of Rights was adopted by the American Library Association (ALA) Council in 1948 and amended in 1961, 1967, 1980, inclusion of "age" reaffirmed 1996. For

cus primarily on those individual rights set forth in Article 19 of the UDHR concerning access to information and expression, there are several instances where group and/or cultural rights are implicated [emphases added]:

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people *of the community* the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the *origin, background, or views* of those contributing to their creation...

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons *and groups* concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of *origin, age, background, or views*.

VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals *or groups* requesting their use.³⁴

It is imperative that if librarians and information workers in the U.S. are to adhere to this fundamental document of our profession, they must give careful attention to the area of cultural rights.

Obligations regarding cultural rights and libraries are also present in our international professional bodies. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the leading international body representing the library and information services profession, was founded in 1927 in Edinburgh, Scotland and now has approximately 1600 members in 150 countries.³⁵ In December 2004, the Governing Board of IFLA endorsed a model for IFLA's operations which has been labeled *IFLA's Three Pillars*. Of these

a full discussion of the original document approved in 1939 and the history of its revisions see Office for Intellectual Freedom of the ALA, "Library Bill of Rights: The Policy History," in *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, 7th ed., (Chicago: American Library Association, 2006), 57-72.

³⁴ ALA, "Library Bill of Rights."

³⁵ International Federation of Library Associations, "About IFLA," <http://www.ifla.org/en/about> (accessed May 26, 2009).

three pillars, the Society Pillar relates most specifically to cultural rights. The Society Pillar is defined thus:

The Society Pillar focuses on the role and impact of libraries and information services in society and the contextual issues that condition and constrain the environment in which they operate across the world. Those issues are addressed currently through FAIFE, CLM, Blue Shield, and our advocacy in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and other arenas.³⁶

The “contextual issues that condition and constrain” the way that libraries and information services operate across the world, while sometimes implicating individual political or civil rights, often directly involve cultural and group rights. While the Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) deals primarily with the former, the Blue Shield Network³⁷ and the WSIS have both addressed cultural and group rights.

Similarly, the IFLA Statutes, adopted at the IFLA Council meeting in Québec City, Canada on August 14, 2008 imply cultural rights in the following sections [emphases added]:

2.2 To achieve its purpose, the Federation seeks:

2.2.1 to promote high standards of delivery of library and information services and professional practice, *as well as the accessibility, protection, and preservation of documentary cultural heritage*. This is done through the enhancement of professional education, the development of professional standards, the dissemination of best practice and the advancement of relevant scientific and professional knowledge;...

2.3 In pursuing its purpose, the Federation shall seek to demonstrate the following core values:...

³⁶ Ibid., “IFLA’s Three Pillars,” <http://www.ifla.org/en/three-pillars> (accessed May 26, 2009).

³⁷ The Blue Shield Network defines itself as the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross – working for the protection of the world’s cultural heritage by coordinating preparations to meet and respond to emergency situations. See Blue Shield Network, “About the Blue Shield,” http://www.ancbs.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=41&Itemid=19 (accessed May 31, 2009).

2.3.2 the belief that people, *communities* and organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas and works of imagination for their social, educational, *cultural*, democratic and economic well-being;...³⁸

Although statement 2.3.2 follows immediately after a statement specifically endorsing Article 19 of the UDHR, it clearly is a strong affirmation of group economic, social, and cultural rights.

Beyond these documents, several scholars have pointed out the imperative of those in the library and information professions to work for social justice and human rights – including cultural rights. Shiraz Durrani, the information worker originally from Kenya who received his library science credentials in the U.K. and worked in both his native Kenya and, later, Britain, has made passionate arguments that all libraries exist in a political, economic, and social context and that libraries play a key role in “collecting, storing, and disseminating knowledge and information relevant to the lives of people.”³⁹ He stresses that “relevance” is the key, otherwise libraries are neglecting their primary purpose. He also emphasizes that for libraries to be relevant to the communities they serve, they must not only have relevant content, but they must also provide content in relevant media (e.g. audio-visual or oral resources) and relevant languages to the communities in question. Durrani emphasizes that librarians and information workers would do well to build off the already existing information structures in place in a given community:

History has shown that people do not wait for “outsiders” to come and satisfy their needs. A time comes in all societies when people take it upon themselves to satisfy their own needs, as it is a matter of their survival. People cannot wait while LIS workers

³⁸ International Federation of Library Associations, *IFLA Statutes* (Hague: IFLA, October 2008), 1-2, <http://www.ifla.org/files/hq/ifla-statutes-en.pdf> (accessed May 31, 2009).

³⁹ Shiraz Durrani, “Information Relevance, Equality, and Material Security: The Kenyan Experience,” *Library Review* 47:1 (1998): 20-25. Now collected in Shiraz Durrani, *Information and Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information and Librarianship* (Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2008), 61. Citations are to the Library Juice edition.

spend years discussing how and what information to provide. They have developed their own information systems and will continue to do so. The question is whether the LIS profession is with people or not and also whether the profession is ready to work with the people in deciding what service they will have.⁴⁰

Similar to Durrani, Toni Samek has documented ways in which library and information workers worldwide have developed social action strategies in working towards a 'critical librarianship' addressing human rights concerns including cultural rights. At the same time, Samek laments the tendency of the profession to focus more on process, technical, and managerial details rather than on the culture of critical librarianship necessary to better support core library values that encourage and promote active participation in the amelioration of social problems.⁴¹ The voices that have emerged from African librarians over the past four decades have echoed these frustrations.

In addition to these scholars, Former IFLA President Kay Raseroka has drawn attention to the fact that the vision of the WSIS includes the following statement:⁴²

We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, assembled in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and prin-

⁴⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁴¹ Toni Samek, *Librarianship and Human Rights: A Twenty-First Century Guide* (Oxford: Chandos, 2007), 3-9.

⁴² Kay Raseroka, "Access to Information and Knowledge," in *Human Rights in the Global Information Society*, ed. Rikke Frank Jørgensen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 91-105.

principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁴³

While seeing this vision as an unqualified acceptance of the fundamental importance of human rights and cultural diversity, Raseroka has argued that libraries must capitalize on the niche they occupy in realizing the ideals of the information society by overcoming some of their current challenges and finding more productive ways of dealing with such cultural issues as orality, indigenous languages, existing cultures of information exchange, and illiteracy.⁴⁴ Other scholars have made compelling arguments for librarians' involvement in meeting human rights needs by examining the ways in which other professions (doctors, lawyers, etc.) have shown their commitment to advancing human rights, and arguing that librarians have long been aware of the many ways that human rights values intersect with the values of the profession. Due to this, they argue, the library profession is bound to uphold its values whether or not we as individuals consider ourselves "activists."⁴⁵ Given the definitions of cultural rights explored above and the imperative of librarians and information workers concern with cultural rights, I now turn to an examination of these issues within the African context.

History of Library Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa, like other regions in the global South, has been deeply affected by colonialism and imperialism. Neo-colonialism disguised in economic, intellectual, and military interests continued in many African countries into the late 20th century.⁴⁶ Many would argue those same forces are still at work. The

⁴³ UN World Summit on the Information Society, *Declaration of Principles: Building the Information Society: A Global Challenge in the New Millennium*, WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/4-E 12, 12 December 2003.

<http://www.un-documents.net/wsis-dop.htm> (accessed May 31, 2009).

⁴⁴ Raseroka, "Access to Information," 92.

⁴⁵ Katharine J. Phenix and Kathleen de la Peña McCook, "Human Rights and Librarians," *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 45:1 (2005): 23-26.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the impact of neo-colonialism on culture, language, and literature in Kenya, see Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Center: The*

majority of political states which emerged from the colonial era have only been in existence since the late 1950s and early 1960s. Due to the powerful grip of colonial powers, and the young age of African nation states, the effects of colonialism and imperialism can still be seen across the continent. The history of library development and the library profession is no exception.⁴⁷ While there were known libraries on the African continent prior to colonialism,⁴⁸ oral tradition and the arts held the greatest responsibility for the preservation and transmission of knowledge and cultural values.⁴⁹ The colonial powers brought their European libraries with them, either to serve their populations exclusively, or to exert a type of intellectual control over the African populations. During this time, libraries were stocked with materials that colonial powers

Struggle for Cultural Freedoms (Oxford: James Currey, 1993); see also Ibid., *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

⁴⁷ For a detailed history of library development in Sub-Saharan Africa, see Sturges and Neill *Quiet Struggle*; see also Anthony Olden, *Libraries in Africa: Pioneers, Policies, Problems* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1995); see also Adolphe O. Amadi, "The Emergence of a Library Tradition in Pre- and Post-Colonial Africa," *International Library Review* 13 (1981): 65-72; for discussions of library development in Africa during the Cold War, see Amanda Laugesen, "'An Inalienable Right to Read': UNESCO's Promotion of a Universal Culture of Reading and Public Libraries and its Involvement in Africa, 1948-1968," *English in Africa* 35:1 (2008): 67-88; see also Mary Niles Maack, "Books and Libraries as Instruments of Cultural Diplomacy in Francophone Africa during the Cold War," *Libraries and Culture* 36:1 (2001): 58-86.

⁴⁸ Afeworki Paulos, "Library Resources, Knowledge Production, and Africa in the 21st Century," *International Information and Library Review* 40 (2008): 251-256. For example, the Library of Alexandria, monastic libraries in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and resource centers of learning in the Mali and Songhai empires.

⁴⁹ Ezekiel E. Kaungamno and Charles S. Ilomo, *Books Build Nations*, vol. 1. *Library Services in West and East Africa* (London: Transafrica Book Distributors, 1979); see also Amusi Odi, "The Colonial Origins of Library Development in Africa: Some Reflections on their Significance," *Libraries and Culture* 26:4 (1991): 594-604.

deemed important for the indigenous populations. Indigenous knowledge and local systems of information exchange were disparaged:

Knowledge production under colonialism was not based on internal dynamism of a community, for indigenous knowledge production was excluded. Colonialism neither incorporated nor recognized indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge was considered backward. Africans were told that progress and civilization could come only from ideas and knowledge generated outside Africa.⁵⁰

To many Africans in the post-colonial nations, the image of the library was inherently connected with colonial rule. The libraries of the French, British, and Portuguese colonialists were often seen as propaganda tools for colonial administrators, representing one part of a multi-pronged effort to devastate the African worldview and subjugate the colonized into alignment with Western notions of reality. Collections across Sub-Saharan Africa from Dakar to Nairobi either reflected the "exalted nature of the colonial power's culture, the glory of its metropolis, or the primitiveness of the 'backward' peoples of Africa."⁵¹

The influence of Western notions of librarianship were evident not only in the physical facilities and materials found in the libraries themselves, but also in the ideology upon which African libraries were based. There was an underlying belief that the information needs and information seeking behavior of Africans were identical to those of library users in the global North and that the concept and philosophy of librarianship as practiced in the Anglo-American tradition could be simply imported to Africa without modifications. It was up to the African public to adapt themselves to this institution rather than the reverse.⁵² There was also an assumption that the "need for information" among different communities (in a larger sense beyond specific information needs) would not differ in

⁵⁰ Paulos, "Library Resources, Knowledge Production," 251.

⁵¹ Odi, "Colonial Origins of Library Development," 598.

⁵² Kingo J. Mchombu, "Which Way African Librarianship?," *IFLA Journal* 17:1 (1991): 26-38.

any substantial way. Even the physical architecture of African libraries during the colonial and post-colonial period reflected the Western influence in such a way as to further alienate African communities. Great resources were spent to build monumental and attractive buildings while resources for services, training, and collections were neglected.⁵³ Collections in public libraries reflected a view of the world which was often of little relevance to the African communities in which they were housed. When large collections were developed for university libraries they often contained outdated materials with little or no academic or research value.⁵⁴ Even after independence many of the pioneer librarians were expatriates from the European continent.

The Western influence on the development of African libraries was also evident in the training of library professionals. African library schools have tended to base their curriculums on models from the global North, thus ignoring the unique information environment and needs of African communities.⁵⁵ Dependency relationships, reflected in the political, economic, social, and cultural relationships between the newly established Sub-Saharan countries and the former colonial powers, manifested in institutions throughout the new nations. Libraries provide an excellent example of the persistence of the colonial heritage after independence and the stifling effects of that relationship.⁵⁶

The history of library development in Africa has also been deeply affected by a belief in the "problem" of the oral tradition and the ideology of librarianship as the preservation and documentation of the written word. The focus on the preservation of books and "knowledge" in archives ran counter to already existing Afri-

⁵³ Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*, 93-95.

⁵⁴ Mchombu, "Which Way African Librarianship?," 27.

⁵⁵ For further discussion on this see Mchombu, "Which Way African Librarianship?"; see also Martina A. Nwakoby, "Special Curricular Themes for Library Education in Nigeria," *International Library Review* 22:4 (1990): 213-224; see also Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*; see also Adolphe O. Amadi, *African Libraries: Western Tradition and Colonial Brainwashing* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1981).

⁵⁶ Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*, 93-95.

can systems of information and communication networking and the highly developed oral tradition. Oral tradition was one of the widespread elements of African culture that came under attack during the colonial period.⁵⁷ The labeling by Western colonials and neo-colonials of the oral tradition as a "problem" ignored the social, historical, and literary relevance of the tradition. Similarly, it severely limited the understanding of African cosmology, knowledge, and the intricate and rich communication systems which had developed over thousands of years.⁵⁸ Western colonialists, donors, and advisors to Africa viewed the written word and the book as the pinnacle of knowledge and went to great lengths to impose this view on others. Similarly, colonial languages were favored while indigenous ones were dismissed. The potential vision of an African library as a service or system to network existing community and local knowledge and in which individuals (e.g. elders, healers, priests, midwives, storytellers, or oral historians), artwork, musical compositions, realia, rituals, and other non-print based materials were recognized as "containers" of that knowledge was not recognized as a valid model by colonial librarians. These competing worldviews on information and communication manifested themselves in the discussions and literature on library development.

The Competing Rhetoric of African Library Development

In the period preceding the independence era and in the immediate post-independence age, the library literature from the global North was frequently marked by tones of paternalism and idealism with many discussions concluding that if Northern libraries, institutions, and associations adopted African libraries and assisted in the flow of information and resources from North to South, the problem of information poverty and stunted library development could

⁵⁷ H.O.M. Iwuji, "Librarianship and Oral Tradition in Africa," *International Library Review* 22:1 (1990): 53-59.

⁵⁸ Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*, 52-54; see also Anaba A. Alemna, *Issues in African Librarianship* (Kaneshe, Accra: Type Co., 1996), 9-15; see also Raseroka, "Access to Information," 92-93.

be alleviated.⁵⁹ Expatriate librarians did a great deal to set the course of library development in Africa during this time. While they came with the best intentions and many recognized and expressed awareness of the need to develop systems and services that could be well-integrated with the unique social, political, and cultural circumstances of their host communities, these intentions did not manifest.⁶⁰ Rather than a meaningful philosophical debate on the construct of the library ideal and information provision, this first batch of expatriate librarians instead attempted to put into place the same systems and patterns of library bureaucracy that existed in their countries of origin.⁶¹

The discourse of paternalism and idealism is everywhere evident in the library literature of this time. One excellent example comes from Wilfred John Plumbe,⁶² one of the most distinguished British expatriate librarians, who had worked in many parts of the colonial world. In his introduction to the Fall 1959 edition of the journal *Library Trends*, which focused on "Current Trends in Newly Developing Countries," Plumbe displays the paternalism and the worldview these expatriate librarians brought with them to their work:

The masses of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America may not yet realize how libraries can change their lives but there is increasing awareness by educationists, politicians, scientists, and all species of administrators, that library services in academic institutions, schools, research organizations, and to the community at large, are fundamental to most other activities and provide the basis for beneficial change. This increasing acceptance

⁵⁹ Lor and Britz, "Knowledge Production," 61-62. See the 1980 publication of the report *Many Voices, One World* (also known as the McBride Report) by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems as a significant turning point in an attitude change toward the issue.

⁶⁰ Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*, 88-89.

⁶¹ For detailed examples of the results of this "alien implant" see Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*, 88-116.

⁶² See Wilfred J. Plumbe, *Tropical Librarianship* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1987) for a full look at his ideas concerning library development in the Global South.

of "the library idea" in newly developing territories is the most important general trend that may be discerned.⁶³

Plumbe goes on to appreciate the international style of library architecture made possible by modern concrete technology. He also stresses the importance of visiting librarians and experts to these countries, made possible by UNESCO and other agencies, to develop the library systems and help in setting up schools of librarianship where "high standards should be achieved."⁶⁴

Growing help from "outside" constitutes a clear trend in development. The United States Information Service and British Council libraries, although small and limited in scope, have greatly exceeded their ambassadorial and propagandist functions, and appreciation of them is worldwide.⁶⁵

Plumbe, in discussing how local authorities must be convinced of the importance of official support for the libraries, explains:

But in the heart of Africa...where enlightened public administration may not be taken for granted, it is still most difficult, sometimes, to establish adequate standards of book provision, library buildings, staffing, and personal service; and it is here that advice and solid financial aid from "outside" have been, and in future can be, invaluable.⁶⁶

To his credit, Plumbe, unlike some of his compatriots, acknowledged that publications must be made available in the local languages otherwise books would remain on the shelves and readers would be frustrated; however, he indicated that this was a problem to be considered only in those countries which had not adopted an official European language. It was implied that for those post-colonial countries which had adopted an official European language, there was no longer a problem. No mention or recognition of the importance of the oral tradition or the existing patterns of communication and information transfer already used by the com-

⁶³ Wilfred J. Plumbe, "Introduction," *Library Trends* 8:2 (1959): 126.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

munities was given. Plumbe's final and concluding statements display the paternalism and missionary zeal that is found in much of the writing by Northern authors on African libraries during this era:

The human story behind all this effort will never be told, or it will be titrated into statistics. It is a small, not very noticeable, part of the saga in social history through which we are living. It has been epitomized by a tribal African who once remarked to the present writer: "The day of the spear has gone; the day of the book has come."⁶⁷

Clearly, the mindset commonly held amongst those early librarians was that the European had brought the book and thus "civilization" to the illiterate savages on the great continent.

A compatriot of Plumbe's, Bernard I. Palmer, writing also in the 1959 issue of *Library Trends*, describes the education and training of librarians in the British Commonwealth Countries and exemplifies the same rhetoric:

Now, "a library is a growing organism," and the appointment of a librarian, indigenous or from overseas, is only the first step towards the future staffing of the library. The second step is the recruitment of local assistance. Frequently this takes the form of a clerk or clerks, who must be instructed in the elements of library work. The better ones respond to this treatment, and since all librarians are educators the intern-training system for the specific library's use widens in scope and soon the librarian is imparting his full knowledge to his staff, and is guiding them in their reading.⁶⁸

Palmer goes on to commend the expatriate librarians for their role in educating the local population in the colonial mindset:

The British Council librarians have done a magnificent job of training, with little or no resources at their command, and have frequently been responsible for the first appearance of local

⁶⁷ Ibid., 129.

⁶⁸ Bernard I. Palmer, "Education and Training of Librarians in the Newly Developing British Commonwealth Countries," *Library Trends* 8:2 (1959): 232.

people on the Library Association's Register of chartered librarians. In furthering knowledge of the British way of life, no group in the community is more worth the expenditure of time and money than librarians, to whom adults turn freely for help and advice all their lives.⁶⁹

These passages again exemplify the attitudes of the times, that the colonial powers of the North were the bringers of knowledge, order, and civilization through the vehicle of library development.

While I will demonstrate later in the chapter that in many ways there has been a shift in tone from Northern information workers concerning African libraries, in some senses "the more things change, the more they stay the same." Writing much later in the 20th century, G.G. Chowdhury,⁷⁰ discussing the changes in Africa's ICT environment, sounds eerily familiar:

Thanks to the many donor agencies and international organizations, the face of Africa's information and communication scenario has been changing to keep pace with the global developments, and soon Africa will be an active participant in the Global Information Infrastructure and be able to drive on the Super-highway.⁷¹

To his credit, Chowdhury recognizes and stresses the importance of such cultural factors as resources in local languages and the building of local information resources so that indigenous information content is available; however, his conclusion is similar to Plumbe's in 1959 – outside aid from experts who can properly train, equip and enlighten the population are the only hope for advancement in the African information environment.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 232.

⁷⁰ G.G. Chowdhury is a distinguished expatriate faculty member who has served at the School of Information Studies for Africa (SISA) and is author of many books and articles on information retrieval, digital resources, and librarianship.

⁷¹ G.G. Chowdhury, "The Changing Face of Africa's Information and Communication Scenario," *International Information and Library Review* 30 (1998): 20-1.

Voices from the Continent

While Northern librarians wrote on African libraries in this manner, a new approach to the view and concept of the library began to emerge from within the continent. Ironically, the roots of this competing rhetoric can be seen in the debate between the two expatriate librarians Wilfred Plumbe, mentioned above, and Ronald Benge, through an exchange of letters in the *Library Association Record*.⁷² Plumbe had argued that the Library Association of the U.K. should adapt its professional education syllabus to be more sensitive to the needs of overseas librarians. In proposing this, however, he did not see any need to change the underlying philosophical foundations of the U.K. library service, which he believed to be transcendent of national boundaries. Benge, in contrast, expressed his belief that Plumbe's focus on physical, environmental, and geographic factors affecting library development in Africa missed much of the point. Rather, Benge recognized that Africa had its own social and cultural values and he thus concluded that librarianship in Africa should build and draw inspiration from those values.⁷³ He went on to flesh out those ideas in his book *Cultural Crisis and Libraries in the Third World*.⁷⁴ African librarians quickly joined their voices into this debate and began to express more and more frustration with the hegemonic influence of Northern dominated modes of thought concerning library development. They drew attention to the fact that this model ignored important cultural aspects including already existing patterns of information and knowledge transfer, local languages, social structures, and the vitality of the oral tradition. Although this rhetoric was not couched in the language of human rights (or cultural rights), the relationship is clearly visible.

Perhaps the strongest example of this anti-Northern and hegemonic tradition can be found in Adolphe Amadi's book *Afri-*

⁷² Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*, 128-129.

⁷³ Ibid., 129.

⁷⁴ Ronald C. Benge, *Cultural Crisis and Libraries in the Third World* (London: Clive Bingley, 1979).

can Libraries: Western Tradition and Colonial Brainwashing.⁷⁵ Amadi focused his work on the negative effects and history of the colonial influence on the African librarian and made a strong case for the need for a radically different approach. Bengé and Amadi laid the groundwork for what was to become known as “African Librarianship.” Younger African librarians adopted this approach and rhetoric which highlighted the need for an African-centric model of library development focused on existing cultural and social values and needs within African communities. These younger librarians often faced stiff resistance as they sought to bring down the old paradigm.⁷⁶ While the rhetoric did not specifically address the issues as human rights concerns, the authors framed the discussion within an anti-colonial and anti-imperialism discourse that is currently recognized as a key part of the development of a global human rights movement. Today this situation has shifted and we see more awareness of issues related to models of African library development within a human rights context. For example, the theme of the 2010 conference of the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Library and Information Associations (SCECSAL) is “Enhancing Democracy and Good Governance through Effective Information and Knowledge Services” and contains several sub-themes specifically addressing individual human rights or human rights as an umbrella concept.⁷⁷

Another seminal work in this area was an article published by K.J. Mchombu, a training officer with the Tanzania National Library Service at the time, in the journal *Libri* in 1982 entitled *On the Librarianship of Poverty*. Mchombu argued that the conditions of poverty must be the base on which any discussion of information work in under-developed countries must be anchored. He elabo-

⁷⁵ Adolphe O. Amadi, *African Libraries: Western Tradition and Colonial Brainwashing* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1981).

⁷⁶ Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*, 130.

⁷⁷ Botswana Library Association, “SCECSAL XIX Conference: XIXth Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Library and Information Associations (SCECSAL) 7th - 10th September 2010, Gaborone, Botswana,” <http://www.scecsal.org/conferences/2010/2010.html> (accessed September 28, 2009).

rated four principles he felt were necessary in order to make information work in developing countries socially relevant:

1. That the chief factor determining Information work in developing countries should be poverty rather than affluence.
2. That Information work in developing countries differs markedly from Information work in developed countries.
3. That it is possible to gather a body of knowledge on how best to meet this challenge.
4. That Information workers must play an active role in the process of socio-economic development.⁷⁸

Mchombu's article became a rallying cry and an agenda for a whole generation of African librarians. Mchombu pointed out that scholars in other areas, such as economics, sociology, political science, and education had done much work in developing a theoretical base for their professions relevant to underdeveloped countries. "With careful interdisciplinary comparative studies, we could learn a lot that would be of great value in this undertaking – if only we could for a moment think beyond our hallowed DDC's, Sears Lists, and cataloguing rules."⁷⁹ In sharp contrast to Plumbe and Palmer, Mchombu lamented the influence of the global North and the previous colonial powers on the training of library and information staff:

Most of the staff holding senior positions in underdeveloped countries have been trained on a background of Information work as practiced in industrialized countries. Not unexpectedly, the prevailing attitude is that this is the way in which users should behave, and the way in which Information services operate. My belief, already stated, is that this is an erroneous view of things because the lavish standards of service that exist in a typical developed country are impossible to maintain in a poor country, unless the objective is to provide an Information service for the fortunate few rather than the majority of mankind in devel-

⁷⁸ Kingo J. Mchombu, "On the Librarianship of Poverty," *Libri* 32:3 (1982): 241.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.

oping societies. Indeed, this does, sadly, appear to be the unstated objective of many an Information service in developing countries. After more than 15 years of existence, and expenditure of millions of shillings, many public Library systems have not yet succeeded in serving more than 1% of the population in their areas.⁸⁰

After discussing at length the existing social factors and their implications for information workers, Mchombu concluded "The scarcity of resources must be reflected by: the pattern of Information services; the role of Information Workers; the way that Information Services are adapted to the locality concerned and the active participation of Information Workers in national development."⁸¹ He emphasized that information services in developing countries should not follow standards blindly copied from developed countries and that information workers need to develop an aggressive attitude and participate fully in the social struggle for national development. He concluded his manifesto unequivocally with the statement "The conclusion is that Information Workers must look for solutions to their problems within their own societies rather than depending on foreign aid."⁸²

While Amadi and Mchombu's writings serve as key examples of the early rhetoric of African librarianship, many African librarians and information workers continued to carry forth this cry and agenda throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Some African librarians focused their writing on the need for greater research on community needs and existing patterns of information transfer than the Anglo-English librarian model allowed.⁸³ Others,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 245-246.

⁸¹ Ibid., 250.

⁸² Ibid., 250.

⁸³ For discussions on Nigerian agricultural and public libraries during this time, see Emmanuel N.O. Adimorah, "An Overview of the State of Information Provision to Rural Communities in Anglophone West Africa," in *Seminar on Information Provision to Rural Communities in Africa: Proceedings of the Seminar held in Gaborone, Botswana, 22-25 June 1994*, ed. Eve Johansson (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University Library, 1995), 80-81; see also Emmanuel N.O. Adimorah, "Rural Community Information Systems and

like B. Olabimpe Aboyade, stressed that information services should repackage information into forms culturally and socially acceptable by the local population.⁸⁴ Still others, such as Anaba A. Alemna from Ghana, emphasized the importance of utilizing the oral tradition as an information resource in African libraries.⁸⁵ Many stressed the importance of changing the library model inherited by the colonial powers to recognize the information needs and abilities of non-literates.⁸⁶ Several African librarians addressed the issues of availability of resources in local African languages. As post-independence African nations struggled to come up with viable language policies, some kept the colonial language in an attempt to avoid conflict between ethnic groups and to open up the possibility of advancement in the world theater.⁸⁷ Others choose to

Culture in Africa," *Resource Sharing and Information Networks* 8:2 (1993): 91-118; see also L.O. Aina, "Information for Successful Agriculture," *Third World Libraries* 2:1 (1991): 49-53; for discussion of research in information seeking behaviors in Zambia, see Andrew M. Kaniki, "Information Seeking and Information Providers among Zambian Farmers," *Libri* 41 (1991): 147-64; for discussion of information needs and existing patterns of exchange in Malawi, see Kingo J. Mchombu, "Information Needs for Rural Development: The Case Study of Malawi," *African Journal of Library, Archives, and Information Science* 2:1 (1992): 17-32.

⁸⁴ B. Olabimpe Aboyade, "Communications Potentials of the Library for Non-Literates: An Experiment in Providing Information Services in a Rural Setting," *Libri* 34:3 (1984): 243-62.

⁸⁵ Anaba A. Alemna, "Towards a New Emphasis on Oral Tradition as an Information Source in African Libraries," *Journal of Documentation* 48:4 (1992): 422-429; see also Iwuji, "Librarianship and Oral Tradition in Africa"; see also Raphael Ndiaye, "Oral Culture and Libraries," *IFLA Journal* 14:1 (1988): 40-46.

⁸⁶ Gboyega Banjo, "Libraries and Cultural Heritage in Africa," *IFLA Journal* 24 (1998): 228-232; see also Fatogoma Diakite, "The Dissemination of Information in a Rural Environment: The Public Library Services and the Rural Audio Libraries of Mali," in *Seminar on Information Provision* (see note 82), 71-79.

⁸⁷ Mamoud Akanni Igwe and Raphael Windali N'Oueni, "The Politics of Language in Benin," in *African Languages, Development, and the State*, ed. Richard Fardon and Graham Furniss (London: Routledge, 1994), 55-61; see also John Povey, "Language Planning in Africa," *Vox: The Journal of the*

establish an African language as their national language for schooling and politics.⁸⁸ A few tried to provide education in a large variety of languages while also teaching and using a national or colonial language.⁸⁹ As African authors such as Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o made strong arguments and impassioned pleas for authors to use indigenous languages in their writing,⁹⁰ similarly, African librarians made arguments that written resources in local languages must be found in African libraries if they are truly to have relevance to the local community and culture.⁹¹

Changes in the Debate

As the closing of the twentieth century grew near, more librarian and information workers from the Northern countries were recognizing the importance of the model of African librarianship being argued for vehemently by voices from within the continent, and several Northern authors broke ranks with the colonial past to endorse the vision being presented by their African colleagues. Diana Rosenberg, in looking at rural libraries and information provision, raised important issues of sustainability which built off of Mchombu's earlier concerns and ideas.⁹² Alfred Kagan argued that

Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education 5 (1991): 72-75.

⁸⁸ Regina Mezei, "Somali Language and Literacy," *Language Problems and Language Planning* 13:3 (1989): 211-223; see also Jeff Unsicker, "Tanzania's Literacy Campaign in Historical-Structural Perspective," in *National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Robert F. Arnove and Harvey J. Graff (New York: Plenum, 1987), 219-244.

⁸⁹ F. Niyi Akinnaso and Isaac A. Ogunbiyi, "The Place of Arabic in Language Education and Language Planning in Nigeria," *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 14:1 (1990): 1-19.

⁹⁰ Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Center*; see also *Ibid.*, *Decolonising the Mind*.

⁹¹ Shiraz Durrani, "Information Relevance, Equality," 63-64.

⁹² Diana Rosenberg, "Can Libraries in Africa Ever be Sustainable?," *Information Development* 10 (1994): 247-251; see also *Ibid.*, "Imposing Libraries: The Establishment of National Public Library Services in Africa, with Particular Reference to Kenya," *Third World Libraries* 4:1 (1993): 35-44; see

one of the three functions of the African rural library was to serve as centers for community, education, and culture.⁹³ B.J. Mostert, in discussing public library services in South Africa, explored the implications and results of information service provision in rural areas that were ill-matched to their environment and concluded that community library services should not be imposed from outside the community nor should they be based on the Western concept of the library.⁹⁴ Perhaps most dramatically, Peter Lor, a South African librarian of European heritage, set out principles for a reformed South African librarianship which built off Mchombu's call for the librarianship of poverty. These principles included:

1. Libraries try to operate at too high a level, and this level should be lowered, without ceasing to strive after excellence.
2. Librarians should commit themselves to the aspirations and values of the communities they serve.
3. There should not be discrimination against users on the basis of literacy.
4. Libraries should give a much higher priority to communication than to organization.
5. Librarians should accept that community information resources have a higher claim on funding than have sophisticated information services.⁹⁵

Sturges and Neill, in responding to Lor, answered that a completely new paradigm was needed, one which shifted from an emphasis on

also Ibid., "Rural Community Resource Centres: A Sustainable Option for Africa?," *Information Development* 9:1/2 (1993): 29-35.

⁹³ Alfred Kagan, "Literacy, Libraries, and Underdevelopment - with Special Attention to Tanzania," *Africana Journal* 13:1/4 (1982): 1-23.

⁹⁴ B.J. Mostert, "Community Libraries: The Concept and its Application - with Particular Reference to a South African Community Library System," *International Information and Library Review* 30 (1998): 71-76.

⁹⁵ Peter Johan Lor, "Africanisation of South African Libraries: A Response to Some Recent Literature" (paper, Info Africa Nova Conference, Pretoria, May 4, 1993) cited in Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*, 135.

libraries to "total information provision." They specified that the new paradigm of information service in Africa must be based on:

1. Financial realism
2. Self-reliance
3. Sustainability
4. Democracy
5. Responsiveness
6. Communication⁹⁶

By democracy, the authors meant that this principle is "a far reaching requirement for service to the whole of the people, rather than just to minorities who might be literate, articulate, influential, geographically accessible or, even, able to pay."⁹⁷ In a bold statement, quite different from many of their Northern colleagues in the Anglo-American tradition, Sturges and Neill echoed the call of many of the African authors cited earlier in this chapter:

Africa's libraries and other information institutions urgently need to break the dependence on Northern values which continues to retard their development. Dependence is as much a psychological phenomenon as an economic one. Indeed, economic chains do not always bind as strongly as those of the mind. To break away from an unwanted dependence is, therefore, not at all easy. What is more, in this case it may, in the short term, increase the poverty that afflicts African information institutions. To be poor is bad, but to be locked into relationships that limit the options for breaking out of that poverty is worse. These relationships can be changed.

It is essential for Africa's library and information community to struggle to avoid dependence on international publishing and bookselling companies, to ensure that donor agencies do not set the parameters of what can be done by the nature of the assistance they give, or that telecommunication and computer technology do not create patterns of information flow incompatible

⁹⁶ Sturges and Neill, *Quiet Struggle*, 136-40.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

with developing country aims. Even more important than this, however, is the need to combat the psychological dependence which is nurtured by modes of thought and philosophies developed in other parts of the world, where both information needs and the resources to meet them are quite different. The imported attitudes and preconceptions of librarianship which dominate in Africa at present both permit and encourage the ways in which this dependency manifests itself.⁹⁸

The roots of the debate had spread wide and far. At the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century, after witnessing the changes of increased globalization, the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals, the development and expansion of new ICTs, the open source and open access movements, the holding of the WSIS, and the global financial crisis, where does the status of this rhetorical debate stand? What new rhetoric and models for African libraries and African information provision are being promoted and to what extent do they address the cultural rights discussed at the beginning of this chapter?

Current Rhetoric and the State of Cultural Rights in African Information Work

In many ways the rhetorical debate between the model of librarianship from the global North and the distinctly different paradigm of "African Librarianship" is still actively taking place. The voices of African librarians and information workers repeat many of the earlier concerns from thirty years ago; however, there is a new emphasis on the role of ICTs and the questions related to their use concerning culture, development, and democracy. At the same time, the voices from Northern librarians and organizations represent a diverse discourse with some continuing strongly in the neo-colonial tradition and others building off the more radical sentiments expressed by Lor and Sturges and Neill in the previous section.

Durrani, writing in 2006 about the Progressive African Librarian and Information Activists Group (PALIAct), describes how this group of African librarians and information workers was re-

⁹⁸ Ibid., 114.

energized during IFLA's 2002 meeting when participants at the Africa Regional Section came to the agreement that "African Librarianship needs to liberate itself from the colonial-imperialist mould."⁹⁹ As we see, it's a different millennium but the same cry for change can be heard. Durrani explains that PALIAct provides a vision for a people-oriented information service; works towards providing an anti-imperialist and Pan African world outlook among information workers; seeks to set up alternative information services in partnership with the users; and aims to form partnerships with progressive information and other workers within Africa and overseas.¹⁰⁰ PALIAct centers are being piloted in Kenya and Ghana. While the strengths of the centers have been the enthusiasm of those individuals and communities involved, Durrani laments that the public library structures in the regions have not actively supported PALIAct because they are marginalized themselves and don't have the financial or other resources necessary to support their own services, much less collaborate or support the PALIAct vision. Durrani also describes a lack of political will from the African governments and regional organizations in the areas. New era, familiar problems.

Raseroka's recent writing in relation to the WSIS addresses the challenges she feels that libraries need to overcome if they are to truly assist in realizing the ideals of the WSIS vision statement. Libraries must find more productive approaches to working with cultural issues such as orality, indigenous languages, and the existing cultures of information exchange. They must also find appropriate cultural mechanisms for aiding literacy development and a reading culture if there is to truly be an inclusive information society.¹⁰¹ As with other African librarians and information workers writing today, Raseroka's rhetoric has changed to incorporate the new challenges and opportunities offered by ICTs. Raseroka emphasizes the paradox inherent in this issue. While ICTs have the

⁹⁹ Shiraz Durrani, "Progressive Librarianship in Africa: the PALIAct Story," *Focus on International Library and Information Work* 37:1 (2006): 4-8. Now collected in Shiraz Durrani, *Information and Liberation* (see note 39).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁰¹ Raseroka, "Access to Information and Knowledge," 91-92.

potential to enable people to produce, record, process, and disseminate information, and to integrate orality and visuality (non-text communication), ICTs must be considered in the context of the existing conditions and influences that have created the current information divide. ICTs represent an "opportunity for empowerment of communities to share and contribute their stories and for librarians to facilitate the capture, preservation, and dissemination of local information through various communication technologies, subject to applicable intellectual property rights."¹⁰² However, Raseroka states clearly this admonition:

In the disadvantageous environment occupied by the majority of people who live in developing countries, and the urban poor in developed countries, the lack of access to ICT is the first hurdle. Where it is accessible, the cost of use and the skills needed for ICT use are barriers. The introduction of ICTs in this environment therefore has a potential to amplify existing inequalities.¹⁰³

Additionally Raseroka, unlike several of her African colleagues who exalt existing information provision structures rooted in local cultures, points to their potential tyranny:

The fundamental challenge in developing an information society in a generalized African culture is that there is already an information society model of hierarchy, age, and gender prescription that is opposed to the principles of human rights on freedom of access to information and freedom of expression. Unless this fundamental approach to information access and communication within traditional developing societies is addressed, the envisaged information society will be a mirage for millions who cling to traditions and indigenous cultures of information-sharing within prescribed systems.¹⁰⁴

In making this connection, Raseroka points to the paradox and difficulty concerning cultural rights mentioned by Eide earlier in this chapter. The manifestations of cultural rights, while a benefit to some, can also create a prison for others, unless the individual

¹⁰² Ibid., 97.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 97.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 100.

truly has the opportunity to participate in that cultural life that is most pertinent to him or her. Raseroka's observations, when examined within the light of Eide's comments, point to the crucial importance of a model of African librarianship where the more inclusive reading of cultural rights presented in the ICESCR's Article 15, the right "to take part in cultural life," is vital. This broader reading recognizes that there are many cultures within one community, rather than *the* implied one cultural life of *the* community as stated in the UDHR's Article 27. It also accepts that the individual has the right to choose which cultural life of the community is most pertinent to him or her. With this broader reading, libraries and information workers must seek ways to provide spaces where all cultural traditions in the community, and in an individual, are equally valued and represented if they are to truly fulfill their role in meeting human rights obligations.

As a concrete example of a new library/information model, Raseroka has described a project in Botswana whose aim is to "nurture local content creation through the breakdown of cultural barriers to intergenerational information expression/access. It seeks to encourage elders to be open to answering children's questions and to nurture children's understanding that they are permitted to ask questions and to develop their rights and duties of asking questions, within the cultural norms."¹⁰⁵ The elders involved share local culture stories in their mother tongue. The project also involves the use of ICTs in processing and posting the stories. Computers and software have been provided in partnership with UNICEF. In discussing the various actors and negotiations that took place for this project to work, Raseroka emphasizes that this effort has represented holistic engagement between the librarians working with communities. However, other earlier writers might argue that this still represents a dependency model (relying on ICTs from UNICEF) and a disrespect for local cultural tradition by the fact that a goal of the program is for cultural barriers to be "broken down." Raseroka puts emphasis on the factors she feels must be in place if ICTs are going to be the tools for building a fair and just

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 100.

society claimed by so many. Among these factors are: a respect for the principles of the UDHR (including recognition of cultural pluralism); that all people are "empowered to communicate in their own voice and language, and to generate local content for their own use and exchange"; and the principles of fair and equal exchange of information resources. Without these factors, Raseroka does not see a radically different reality than that which has plagued the African information environment in the past, with technologically advanced and economically powerful nations owning and manipulating the intended information society.¹⁰⁶

It is clear that the factors highlighted by Raseroka must be present if a new model of African information work is going to firmly break the bonds of the colonial past. While there are many examples of how the principles of fair and equal exchange of information are currently being ignored, there is also growing evidence that new movements such as the open source and open access movements and indigenous knowledge management philosophies are propelling African information work towards equity. The question remains however, can these new movements be strong enough and widespread enough to combat the hegemonic forces of global capitalism and the resulting cultural influences of language and commodification?

Related to this, other African information workers writing in the first decade of the 21st century have built on the concerns of earlier librarians by emphasizing the importance, challenges, and dilemmas of the documentation and communication of indigenous knowledge. Jabulani Sithole points out the individualistic nature of indigenous knowledge (from grandparent or parent to child) and the concept of "knowledge as power" in which knowledge is a source of status and income and is thus guarded jealously and cannot be easily shared.¹⁰⁷ This raises difficulties for libraries to document and disseminate this cultural knowledge. Sithole also explores the complex issues of intellectual property rights with regards to

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 103

¹⁰⁷ Jabulani Sithole, "The Challenges Faced by African Libraries and Information Centres in Documenting and Preserving Indigenous Knowledge," *IFLA Journal* 33:2: 122.

indigenous knowledge. In contrast with earlier African librarians, Sithole and some of his colleagues elaborate more on the complex issues raised with the promotion of cultural rights such as use of indigenous knowledge. For the earlier librarians, the documentation and communication of indigenous knowledge was an ideal and goal for the reformed "African librarianship," whereas, for today's librarians, it is a reality with its own nuances, challenges, complexities, and a host of ethical issues.

The signs of paternalism and missionary zeal that manifested in the earlier writings from librarians of the global North are still evident today. The difference, however, is that there is more of a generalized recognition and acceptance of certain aspects of cultural rights where often none existed before. For example, Betsie Greyling, the systems librarian at eThekweni Municipal Library in Durban, South Africa has written about a model developed for public libraries in South Africa whereby the public libraries engage the community in establishing a digital library of indigenous knowledge. In this model, community workers collect oral and visual materials, community members are taught how to add materials to the Internet at the library, the library acts as moderator and custodian (rather than owners) of the indigenous knowledge resource, and the community in partnership with the library is a key element. While this innovative approach appears overall to be community focused and favoring cultural rights, there is a paternalistic tone to the description of the foreseen benefits:

A website of local indigenous knowledge will provide information about local technologies and culture. Improved digital skills will result in economic empowerment of communities and progress in poverty alleviation. Knowledge provision will enable behavior changes and informed decision making, as well as promoting the creation of new knowledge within the community. It will stimulate innovative thinking, aid learning and promote indigenous technologies. Formal and informal knowledge levels in the community will be enhanced, leading to an informed society.

Ultimately a culture of knowledge sharing between community members will improve social cohesion in the community.¹⁰⁸

In addition to echoing earlier sentiments of ex-colonial librarians, these statements diminish the fact that knowledge sharing and new knowledge creation are already a part of the community. While the creation of the website of local indigenous knowledge with the community's participation is a worthwhile goal for an African library seeking to be more relevant to the community and achieve the objectives above, a successful library would also create spaces and networks to expand existing knowledge transfers already taking place within the community. These might take the form of community forums, discussion groups, festivals, demonstrations of local agricultural or manufacturing techniques, or musical performances.

Similarly, another librarian from the Anglo-American tradition, Valeda F. Dent Goodman, has recently reported on impact studies in current rural village libraries in Ghana and Burkina Faso. The libraries were started in 2001 by the Friends of African Village Libraries, an organization based in California. The qualitative and quantitative data was gathered by researchers from the USA and Germany in separate studies conducted between 2004 and 2007.¹⁰⁹ Several elements of the libraries' operation show a recognition for cultural rights, such as materials relevant to the community in local languages and the importance of the librarian as a member of the community. Yet, the old model still remains. Focus groups and individual interviews played a role in the qualitative data gathering. Several of the questions in the survey are leading questions such as "Do you think having the library in the community has improved your quality of life? How?" and "Do books help you cope with the day-to-day problems, for example, health-related, job-related, par-

¹⁰⁸ Betsie Greyling, "A Model for Community Participation in African Libraries to Preserve Indigenous Knowledge," *Information Studies* 14:2 (2008): 81-82.

¹⁰⁹ Valeda F. Dent Goodman, "Rural Library Services: Historical Development and Modern-Day Examples from West Africa," *New Library World* 109:11/12 (2008): 519.

enting, etc.”¹¹⁰ Goodman concludes, based on the data gathered, that these rural libraries are prime examples of how “an institution that has historically been ineffective for the majority of residents in many African countries – in this case, the public library – can in fact be crafted to serve a variety of needs of those in rural areas”¹¹¹ and “The importance of supporting the newly literate and the development of reading cultures in rural areas cannot be overstated. This is best accomplished with local community collaborations that provide access to reading materials and other services while advancing respect for local languages, cultures, and practices.”¹¹² While cultural elements such as languages, cultural practices, and community connections are clearly given some attention, the overall impression of this project is one in which an outside group has created the service and is then creating the paradigm with which to evaluate it. There may be much more cultural sensitivity than previous models in the immediate post-colonial era but the idea of “cultural rights” as elaborated by scholars on cultural rights as well as the more “radical” librarians, both African and Anglo-American, cited earlier does not appear to be present in this type of example. It is a far cry from the radical approaches advocated and discussed earlier by Mchombu, Amadi, Lor, and Sturges and Neill.

Despite the two examples above, several librarians from the global North or from European heritage have continued to elaborate on the ideas of the radicals and call for a different vision for African libraries, one that emphasizes the financial realities of African countries and societies, the oral means of information sharing, promotion of community context above all other, active rather than passive information sharing, and promotion of indigenous production of knowledge rather than information coming solely from publishers outside of Africa.¹¹³ Johannes J. Britz and Lor have

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 524.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 529.

¹¹² Ibid., 530.

¹¹³ Diana Rosenberg, “Giving Journals Published in Africa a Presence on the Web: The African Journals Online Project,” *The Serials Librarian* 37:3 (2000): 71-82; see also Jacques C. du Plessis, “From Food Silos to Com-

written eloquently on the ethical dimensions of the “global information society” and some of the current elements that are “morally wrong,” including unfair intellectual property right regimes – specifically toward the developing countries; unfair exploitation and misappropriation of indigenous knowledge and artifacts; and the imbalance of north-south and south-north flow of information.¹¹⁴ Britz and Lor have identified three core principles and seven categories of justice they propose can be used as the moral cornerstone for facing the ethical challenges of the global Information Society. Although much of their writing relates to access issues more commonly associated with Article 19 of the UDHR, the authors have strong statements in favor of cultural rights and group rights to self-determination. Similarly, Rafael Capurro, another information worker from the global North, in writing of information ethics and Africa, has looked deeply at both the impact of ICTs on African societies and cultures from a philosophical perspective and the meaning of cultural and collective memory. Capurro reminds both Northern and African audiences:

The retrieving of African cultural memory in the field of information and communication is a main challenge for information ethics. It requires awareness of the different strategies of social inclusion and exclusion in the history of African societies, including such traumatic experiences as slavery and apartheid interpreted under this perspective. With the emergence of the Internet, the most recent expression of this challenge with regard to the new information and communication technologies is being discussed under the heading of the digital divide. But much more is involved than just access to and use of this medium, particularly if all other forms of social exclusion, manipulation, exploitation, and annihilation of human beings are left out of the

munity Kitchens’ - Retooling African Libraries,” *International Information and Library Review* 40 (2008): 43-51.

¹¹⁴ Johannes J. Britz, “Making the Global Information Society Good: A Social Justice Perspective on the Ethical Dimensions of the Global Information Society,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 5:7 (2008): 1173; see also Peter Johan Lor and Johannes Britz, “Knowledge Production from an African Perspective”.

discussion by reducing the digital divide to merely a technical problem.¹¹⁵

Capurro, Britz, Lor and other more recent librarians and information workers from the global North reveal that there has been a change in the rhetoric from outside African communities. While the colonial legacy lives on in information work and discourse, there has also been a shift, at least in awareness, if not always in practice.

Conclusion: The Importance of Cultural Rights and Library and Information Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

As an American information worker who came to the field because of my experiences working in education and literacy in a rural area of the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) where I was called upon by the local community to help develop a library, I have seen first hand how good intentions can fail and even sometimes do harm. Because of this I am deeply aware that the discourse of library development in Africa is not just an issue of rhetoric. Rather, it can have a profound impact on lives and communities. The voices of African librarians calling for a new vision of information work on the continent is beginning to make an impact on librarians and information workers in the global North. The question remains however, what substantial change will have occurred when we look back from fifty years down the road? As African and non-African librarians seek to incorporate cultural rights into information work, other issues will need to be negotiated and resolved, such as Raseroka's and Eide's points concerning the tension between cultural models of hierarchy, age, and gender prescription and the right to choose one's own culture. Difficult as it may be to discuss, define, measure, and even sometimes agree on the idea of cultural rights, without honoring, exploring, and respecting the cultural rights set forth in Article 27 of the UDHR and Article 15 of

¹¹⁵ Rafael Capurro, "Information Ethics For and From Africa," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 59:7: 1167.

the ICESCR, African libraries will continue to reflect some part of the colonial past.

Given the traditions of social justice and human rights inherent in the core values of the Anglo-American tradition of librarianship discussed earlier in this chapter, and the principles set forth in the statutes of IFLA, our most international representation of the library profession, librarians and information workers in the global North who are engaged with African libraries at any level must take a closer look at the implications of cultural rights presented in our International Bill of Human Rights. Here I would argue that the language of ICESCR Article 15, recognizing the right of everyone to "take part in cultural life" is a more useful umbrella under which to stand in that it does not limit us to thinking that there is just one cultural community to serve. Most African communities, regardless of size, contain multiple ethnic, linguistic, gender, age-specific, socio-economic, and religious sub-communities. An individual within a particular sub-community may feel that a different sub-community is more relevant to his or her needs because of a change in religious or political identity or due to a change in socio-economic, marital, or educational status. These personal migrations of identity reveal the fluidity of cultural identity and must be respected by librarians and information workers seeking to meet the needs of all members of the community.

As revealed by the rhetoric of African librarians and information workers, and those from the global North who have also taken up their call, workers involved in building and supporting sustainable and responsive community-centered libraries in an African context must question all assumptions of Northern models of information provision imposed both during colonialism and now continued in the age of rapid globalization if they are to fully realize the cultural rights inherent in library work. There is a tendency in some quarters, both on and off the continent, to believe that the adoption of ICTs with their potential for digitizing local content and making audio and video formats more accessible, will do much to "level the playing field" in terms of flow of information from North to South while also expanding locally relevant materials and thus achieving a certain realization of cultural rights. This is a dan-

gerous assumption, based once again on solutions from outside, and often not adequately taking into account the economic and power dynamics underlying ICT transfers. As both Raseroka and Capurro have pointed out, unless existing disparities and traditions which work against equity, access, and cultural rights are addressed, the use of ICTs will only amplify current conditions.

Without the recognition and respect of cultural rights, librarians and information workers engaged in African information provision, whether from within the continent or the global North, will be providing a roadblock for the full provision and realization of all human rights as stated in the UDHR. Human rights, as set forth and recognized in this document, are indivisible. We can not pick or choose our favorites. We cannot decide that it is our task as information workers to allow access to information but that we will keep that access only available in the languages of the colonial past. Similarly, we cannot decide that we will contribute to the right to access to education, but only if that education is based on the written word. Library and information workers engaged on the African continent must examine the needs of all communities and sub-communities within which they work, the existing cultural traditions of information provision already at play within those communities, and the economic realities that will determine sustainability. They must then base their library philosophy and services on those conditions rather than modeling them on an imposed notion or structure of information provision simply because it has become the internationally accepted "norm." Without such an approach, it is highly likely that we will be looking back fifty years from now and seeing the same problems wearing different technological garb.